

# Re-thinking Health Care Strategies in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

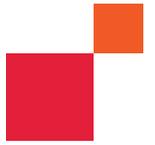
What it takes to deliver  
innovation, impact, and scale

January 2026



**Maria Schneider**, Partner, [maria.schneider@omc.com](mailto:maria.schneider@omc.com)

**Manisha Sabharwal**, Managing Consultant, [manisha.sabharwal@omc.com](mailto:manisha.sabharwal@omc.com)



# Introduction

## *How are pharmaceutical companies redefining success in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) as both access priorities and market opportunities evolve?*

Rabin Martin conducted interviews with two dozen experts from 13 of the largest pharmaceutical companies working in market access and strategy roles across the industry. The goal was to understand better how these companies are navigating the complexity of LMICs, where traditional models don't always apply and success looks different than in high-income settings.

Interviewees shared practical insights on operating models, team structures, partnerships, and what it takes to deliver both innovation and impact in these complex markets. Their perspectives reflect a wide range of experiences yet share common themes, tensions, and lessons.

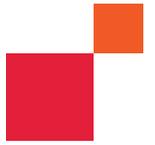
### **WHAT WE LEARNED**

**Companies are rethinking what commercial success looks like in LMICs.** Rather than chasing short-term revenue, many are adapting their strategies to reflect the realities on the ground, related to health system constraints, affordability needs, and evolving health priorities. Success is still the goal, but it's being defined more broadly to include patient reach, uptake, and integration into national health systems, all of which lay the foundation for sustainable growth.

**Each organization is at a different point in its journey, shaped by unique portfolios, pipelines, priorities, and constraints.** There's no universal playbook. What's emerging is a shift in mindset. LMICs are no longer seen only as corporate social responsibility outposts or loss-leader territories, but as strategic growth markets where value is created over time through adaptation and persistence.

**The external environment is changing – as are product portfolios.** Historically, LMIC strategies focused on infectious diseases, often enabled by global donor procurement and tiered pricing. But as company portfolios shift toward chronic conditions, the challenges look very different. Success in reaching more people in more parts of the world now requires early investment in health system readiness. Companies are adopting thoughtful approaches to affordability across income segments and staying committed for the long term.

**The LMIC opportunity is real – companies can deliver value while strengthening care systems.** Bringing innovation to LMICs isn't just about price and product profile; it's also about preparation and delivery. Success depends on shaping the market early, aligning internal commercial and social impact efforts, and investing in delivery pathways that reach beyond the capital city to achieve population health gains and greater equity.



# Key Findings



## ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN LMICs MEANS PLAYING THE LONG GAME

Success in LMICs takes time and consistent investment. In many markets, meaningful progress doesn't happen in quarterly cycles – it unfolds over several years, through policy alignment, system investments, and persistent local engagement. Companies that succeed aren't just measuring performance by sales or margin, but by other indicators such as patient reach, standard-of-care adoption, health system integration, and enabling policies.

In one country, a company's 10-year investment led to a tenfold increase in market size over five years by aligning early with national health priorities and building trusted partnerships. They invested in local systems and relationships that led to steady progress over time.

Playing the long game means companies commit to sustained presence, adapt to local realities, recruit and empower local talent, measure what matters, and find ways to create both health impact and commercial value.



## MARKET SEGMENTATION ENABLES BETTER-INFORMED STRATEGIC DECISIONS

LMICs are incredibly diverse – economically, socially, culturally, politically, and structurally. Applying global strategies uniformly or having a one-size fits all approach is likely to fail. Therefore, companies are using archotyping models to make sharper investment decisions. They are moving beyond income classification

and applying structured segmentation frameworks that are based on policy commitment, disease burden, socioeconomic status, health equity considerations, health system maturity, and commercial readiness.

Successful strategies often focus on a smaller set of countries where there is a clear opportunity to make headway. These are usually places with strong health systems or strong national health plans. These markets receive dedicated resources and leadership support, including a 3 to 5-year investment commitment.

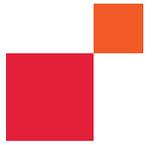
Segmentation and priority-setting are not just planning tools, but important signals of strategic intent.



## EARLY INVESTMENT LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR SCALE

Early investment in health system readiness, even before product launch, can lay the foundation for faster uptake and more durable access after regulatory approval.

Investing early enables companies to shape the market before entry. It builds credibility, systems, partnerships, and policies that are essential to create the demand required for sustainable uptake. This groundwork includes not only planning around pricing and reimbursement but also establishing relationships with policymakers, local partners, and health care providers – assuring that they launch on stronger footing and achieve meaningful reach.



# Key Findings



## DELIVERY CAPACITY IS CENTRAL TO ACCESS AND UPTAKE

Even the most affordable and effective product won't succeed in LMICs if delivery infrastructure is weak. Across markets, companies are encountering the same barrier – without diagnostics, referral systems, cold chain, trained providers, and patient awareness, equitable access will not become a reality.

This realization is prompting a shift in how companies define access. It is no longer just about product pricing or registration, but about the full delivery ecosystem. Several organizations have begun investing directly in screening programs, mobile clinics, diagnostics platforms, and logistics networks, often in partnership with governments and NGOs to close gaps along the patient pathways.

Further, these delivery investments are no longer being treated as philanthropy. They are seen as core enablers of market success. Some companies are even tracking diagnostic capacity as a lead indicator for launch readiness, especially for oncology, rare diseases, and NCDs. Investing in health systems used to be a post-launch thought but now, the most strategic players are treating health system investments as a prerequisite for uptake.



## COUNTRY-LEVEL EXECUTION DRIVES RESULTS

Being commercially successful in LMICs depends on how well local teams are empowered to adapt, engage, and deliver. Strategy and prioritization often happen at the global or regional level, but those plans must be adapted and implemented locally.

Country teams are playing a pivotal role in translating strategy into action – particularly in these fragmented systems. Companies are moving toward lean, independent local teams responsible for both meeting commercial goals and access objectives. These teams – ideally composed of entrepreneurial and savvy individuals from these markets – lead local partnerships, engage with governments, and drive local demand while receiving support from regional teams for regulatory, legal, and compliance needs.

However, this model succeeds only when local teams are trusted to lead. Their ability to deliver results depends on their autonomy and proximity to the market. Without strong country-level execution, even the best strategies just remain ideas on paper.



## INNOVATION REQUIRES SYSTEM ADAPTATION, NOT JUST PRICE CUTS

Innovative therapies for chronic and complex diseases face a higher bar in LMICs. Pricing is only one part of the solution. These products require systems that can find the right patients, support diagnosis, deliver treatment, and sustain care over time.

Increasingly, companies are taking a broader, more comprehensive view of the patient journey. Sometimes leveraging philanthropy, they are investing in provider training, clinical guideline updates, strengthening local data systems, and supporting patient tracking and registries.

Delivering innovation requires aligning with how care is delivered, including diagnostics, guidelines, provider readiness, and financing. Companies that invest in this foundation at the outset, and do so in partnership with governments and local actors, are far more likely to see their innovations approved, reimbursed, adopted, and sustained at scale.



## Turning Ambition into Action

Low- and middle-income countries are no longer viewed only as philanthropic opportunities or access obligations. Increasingly, they are recognized as meaningful, dynamic markets. Companies are learning that it is possible to succeed commercially while expanding access to essential and innovative products alike. This shift is most visible in markets where companies have invested in long-term relationships, delivery platforms, and policy alignment.

What's emerging is a new model of growth – one that is grounded not just in affordability, but also in system readiness, and credible and sustained local engagement. These markets, despite their complexity and slower growth, offer a pathway to future-proof portfolios in areas like oncology, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease with enormous health benefits for millions more people.

Getting there requires new ways of working, including:

- Strong leadership and long-term commitment
- Clear strategies to select and the right markets on which to focus

- Cross-functional teams that see commercial and access priorities as inextricably linked
- Operating models that balance global strategy with local flexibility
- Internal structures that support LMIC realities

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and no magic bullet. But companies that bring the same energy and rigor to access and delivery innovation as they do to R&D and finance are best positioned for success in these markets.

**At Rabin Martin, we help organizations navigate this transition – drawing on deep experience with corporations, NGOs, multilaterals organizations, and private foundations across product types, geographies, and delivery models. Whether planning for launch, building market-shaping strategies, or operationalizing access at scale, we work with clients to turn ambition into action – ensuring that global health equity and commercial viability are not competing goals, but mutually reinforcing outcomes.**